

SOCIAL ACTION NEWS-LETTER

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THE CHURCHES AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT

One of the gratifying developments of recent years is the growing friendship between organized labor and the churches. In Britain, where the labor movement received its initial impulse from the Wesleyan Revival, a close relationship between religion and labor is taken for granted. In the U.S. the churches—especially the Protestant churches—were from the beginning identified with the pioneers, to whom "free enterprise" meant the unlimited right to exploit the nation's natural resources of land, timber, coal, iron, and oil. The church was the religious sanctuary of the middle and upper classes. Protestantism's traditionally close alliance with capitalism forbade any close scrutiny of the social order to discover deviations from the kingdom of God. Since Protestants generally were identified with developing business and industry there was little community of interest with the workers. When the first local unions were organized about 1822, and especially after 1870, when various national unions began to come into existence, the churches were further alienated by the violence which often accompanied strikes. Labor leaders such as Terence V. Powderly, president of the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor, Eugene V. Debs, organizer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and Samuel Gompers, architect of the American Federation of Labor, learned to look upon the church with suspicion as an instrument of the employers.

The industrial expansion following the Civil War brought millions of immigrants to our shores. First came the Irish, driven out of their homeland by famine. They helped to build our railroads and our great industrial plants. Later came the Italians and the Jews. Both the Irish and the Italians were predominantly Catholic in religion. Thus the Roman Catholic Church in America was confronted with a huge task of conserving the newcomers and bringing them into church relationship in their new homes. It was in this way that the Catholic Church got an early start in the American labor movement, a fact which is today demonstrated in the Catholic Trades Union Association, the agency through which the Church trains its people to be both good Catholics and good trades unionists. The same thing happened when the Jews began to move in on the garment industry. They were strangers in a strange land and the rabbi was their first—and sometimes their only—friend. Since Protestants, in general, belonged to the more privileged middle and upper classes, they had less in common with the workers and sympathized less with their condition. The result was a distinct cleavage between the Protestant churches and organized labor.

The situation however has begun to change. Churches of all faiths recognize in the 15 million dues-paying union members the largest organized group in American life other than the church itself. With the development of industrial unionism has come a concern for democracy and human welfare that has challenged the attention of the church. Labor is today active in all sorts of civic and social welfare programs in the local, the state and the national community. Labor leaders command respectful attention when they speak. Many of them are active churchmen. In another column in this issue will be found a reference to Al Whitehouse, who spoke at a luncheon meeting at the Columbus convention. Mr. Whitehouse is not only a member of the national executive board of the United Steel Workers and chairman of the Kentucky CIO Council, but he is also a trustee, an elder and chairman of the board of the Latonia (Ky.) Christian Church. John G. Ramsay, public relations director of the United Steel Workers, is a Presbyterian layman of many years standing and an active church worker. Dr. Orville C. Jones,

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REVIEW OF THE LABOR YEAR

For a number of years it has been the custom of *Social Action News-Letter* to review in the September issue the events of the labor year in preparation for observance of Labor Sunday in the churches. Space limitations forbid detailed discussion of events or, indeed, any attempt to cover all the significant happenings in the field of labor-management relationships. The purpose is rather to interpret trends in labor-management relations and to contribute to a better understanding of labor's aims and achievements.

BACKGROUND. Many people were disturbed by the outbreak of strikes immediately following V-J Day. They were tired of rationing of meat, sugar, shoes, clothing, and other articles. They wanted reconversion to peacetime production immediately. They were clamoring for new cars, new refrigerators, new radios, and all the marvelous things that industry had promised. Their pockets were full of money and they wanted to spend it. Labor disturbances frustrated their plans. Therefore many of them jumped to the conclusion that labor was wholly to blame for their inconvenience. Having made up their minds they made no effort to understand what was happening or what were the causes.

The average citizen was so persistently fed on stories of fantastic war wages that he imagines all workers were overpaid during the war. He forgets that the minimum wage throughout the entire war was 40c per hour and that many workers got no more than that amount. He forgets that the fantastic wages he heard about were in certain war industries, that these wages represented work weeks that ranged from 48 to 60 hours, that these fat pay envelopes represented anywhere up to 20 hours of overtime at time-and-a-half and double-time rates, all of which ceased suddenly with V-J Day. Forgotten, too, is the fact that workers did not receive all the cash they earned. Payroll deductions for income tax took at least 20 percent, and in many cases more. After deductions were made for social security, bond purchases, union dues, and other items, the average worker had a considerably smaller take-home pay. The fact is, take-home wages were never as high as many people imagined them to be. It is true that wages in some lines were much higher than in ordinary times. But so were living costs, especially around war plants where these wages were earned.

Another fundamental misunderstanding is the relation of *earned* wages to *real* wages. Wages must be evaluated in relation to living costs. Thus, if *earned* wages increase 15 percent and living costs go up 30 percent, it is obvious that the worker has suffered an actual reduction of wages in relation to the costs of living. Something like that happened during the war years. The government first computed living costs on the August, 1939 average, but later switched to April, 1941 figures. It was on the latter that OPA based its ceilings. The War Manpower Commission devised the "Little Steel Formula," which held wage increases down to 15 percent on the theory that living costs had increased that much, though practically every index showed a higher figure. Throughout the war labor fought the "Little Steel Formula" because it worked an injustice on the workers who had to cope with constantly increasing costs of food, clothing, rent, and other human needs.

STRIKES. Instead of immediate reconversion to peacetime production and the flood of consumer goods expected, the nation was for months in the grip of a series of disastrous strikes, beginning in the steel industry and extending to automobiles, electrical goods, coal, meat packing, farm machinery, and numerous other lines. In May the nation's railroads were tied up for 48 hours by a nationwide strike of engineers and trainmen. Exercising his

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CHURCH AND LABOR AT COLUMBUS CONVENTION

The relations of the church and labor was given serious consideration at the International Convention of Disciples of Christ at Columbus, Ohio, August 6-11, 1946, though the subject was not on the official convention program. Dr. Willard Uphaus, executive secretary of the National Religion and Labor Foundation, through the Columbus chapter of that organization, arranged for a Church and Labor luncheon at the YWCA on Thursday, August 8, at which an attendance of between 50 and 60 persons was registered. The speaker for the occasion was Al Whitehouse, who in addition to being director of District 25, a member of the executive board of the United Steel Workers of America, and president of the Kentucky CIO Council, is also a trustee, an elder and chairman of the board of elders and deacons of the Latonia (Kentucky) Christian Church. In his address Mr. Whitehouse stressed the parallelism between the organization of a church and the organization of a labor union. The evangelist who comes to the city to organize a church is an organizer. He seeks out "prospects" and attempts to interest them in the church. If he succeeds he "signs them up." When he secures a sufficient group he organizes them into a congregation. Then begins a program of education, evangelism, stewardship and service. Unionism, said Mr. Whitehouse, follows the same process. Its interest is more than simply getting higher wages for fewer hours of work, and extends to the whole process of developing better individuals, better citizens, and more intelligent defenders of democracy.

On Friday night, August 9, the Disciples Peace Fellowship staged a discussion on the Church and Labor, with Dr. Orville Jones, former professor at Oberlin Theological Seminary and now public relations director of the Ohio CIO Council, and Mr. Jacob Klamann, attorney for the Ohio CIO Council, as participants. Following brief presentations by each of the speakers the meeting was opened for questions and discussions. Many of the questions asked dealt with criticisms frequently made of union policies and practices. So interested did the audience become that the chairman had difficulty in bringing the meeting to a close and several discussants lingered till midnight for further conference with the speakers.

The convention passed a resolution on economic tensions which reaffirmed support of the Social Ideals of the Churches adopted by the Federal Council of Churches and the statement approved by that body at its meeting in Columbus in March, 1946, supporting the 65 cent an hour minimum wage bill and the Fair Employment Practices Bill. The Department of Social Welfare was asked to give increased attention to management-labor relations and to seek to bring the church more closely into touch with both groups. The resolution was submitted to the convention by the board of managers of The United Christian Missionary Society.

James A. Crain presided at both meetings. Harold L. Lunger of Oak Park, Illinois and Dr. Willard Uphaus, of New Haven, Connecticut, executive secretary of the National Religion and Labor Foundation, spoke briefly at the luncheon meeting.

HOW FREE IS OUR FIRST FREEDOM?

Freedom of speech and of the press is the first of our freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, the first amendment to the Constitution demanded by the people as the basis of its acceptance. How free is speech and the press in the United States? The American Civil Liberties Union has recently announced a study on monopoly and control of the press by Morris L. Ernst, under the title, "The First Freedom." Mr. Ernst, for more than 30 years a member of the New York Bar, has figured prominently in many cases involving the public interest. He has represented the American Newspaper Guild and has served as attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union in many freedom of the press and radio and motion picture cases. He is a well known writer, his articles appearing in such magazines as *The Nation*, *Survey*, and other publications.

Out of wide knowledge of ownership and control of newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and moving picture theatres, Mr. Ernst reports:

That although the U.S. has more than 40,000,000 daily newspaper circulation, ten states do not have a single city with competing dailies. This means a high concentration of monopoly in news dissemination.

Fourteen corporations which own 18 newspapers control about one-fourth of the total daily circulation, and 375 chain newspapers have one-fifth of all circulation.

More than one-fourth of our newspapers are owned by absentee interests. In other words, the owners do not live in the community in which the paper is published.

There are 22 states in which there is no Sunday newspaper competition.

There are only 117 cities in the entire country where competing dailies still exist.

Although weekly newspapers are considered the backbone of local democracy, 3,200 of them have disappeared and one company now dominates more than 3,000 weeklies, supplying canned articles, canned editorials and canned columns.

The number of daily newspapers has dropped from 2,600 a few years ago to 1,700 today. Ownership has gradually been brought into the hands of a small number of individuals and corporations, with the result that many local papers are controlled by absentee owners.

The tendency to resort to syndicated articles, features, and columns tends to regiment the news and to feed the readers only one set of opinions.

In the radio field there is said to be 59,000,000 radio sets in American homes. But one-third of all regular radio stations are said to be financially affiliated with newspapers.

Before the war four networks had 95 percent of all night-time broadcasting power, while eleven advertisers contribute about 50 percent of all network income and 144 advertisers supply 97 percent of all network income.

Turning to the movies, Mr. Ernst finds that the 100 million people who attend picture shows each week must pay tribute to the five producing companies who control 2,800 key theatres of the nation, and take in three-fourths of all the money paid for movie admissions. These five companies control for all practical purposes the movie industry of the country. They own outright practically all the leading theatres and dominate the independents through block-booking, blind-selling and control of play dates for films. Thus the few men who control these five companies are able to determine what one hundred millions Americans shall see or shall not see on the screens of the nation's picture houses. These five companies can also be blamed for the puerile and often vicious character of many of the films presented.

It is not merely the fact of monopoly that makes this situation serious, as dangerous as monopoly may be to our American way of life. Its principal danger is that a relatively few people are able to control the sources of our information and to determine without interference what we shall read, what we shall hear and what opinions shall be presented to us. People who have oppor-

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ON SOCIAL FRONTIERS

The World Staff of Associated Press warns that the Army Air Forces will put on more spectacular demonstrations like the trip of the two crewless B-17 drones from Hawaii to California. Predicted next is a 10,000 mile flight by a B-29 over the magnetic North Pole from Honolulu to Cairo. Major General Curtis E. LeMay, head of the Army Air Forces development staff is quoted as saying that within four years rockets will range up to 6,000 miles and be capable of delivering "a telling tonnage of explosives" with considerable accuracy. Also predicted is jet-propelled aircraft capable of carrying atomic bombs. That the U.S. is not alone in the development of rocket missiles is indicated by reports from Sweden that hundreds of rockets, some as long as 90 to 100 feet, are passing over that country and some falling within its borders. The rockets seem to be coming from the Russian-occupied section of the German Baltic coast.

* * *

A report recently released by the U.S. Federal Reserve System covering an investigation made by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture, shows that 40 percent of the people have practically no savings, though the top 10 percent have "liquid assets" averaging \$10,500. Below the top 10 percent is another 20 percent whose savings average \$2,350. Another 30 percent have assets averaging \$700, but the lowest 40 percent have only an average of \$40. From another standpoint, those in the top 20 percent had 45 percent of the money income, accounted for 82 percent of the savings and held 77 percent of the savings deposits, demand deposits and governmental securities. The top 10 percent had 29 percent of the money income, while the bottom 50 percent had only 22 percent. The top 10 percent had 60 percent of the liquid assets and those in the bottom 50 percent had only 3 percent.

(From *Economic Justice*)

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Trade unions have grown rapidly in France, Italy, Great Britain and Germany, according to the July news release of the U. S. Department of State. Membership in the principal unions of France is estimated at six and three-quarter million, Italy, five million, and Great Britain, eight and one-half million. The release says that in the Soviet zone of Germany, the Free German Trade Union League recently claimed a membership of over two million. Union membership in the American and British zones of Germany has been estimated at a half million each, with a considerably lower figure for the French zone.

* * *

Twenty-one theological schools are operating in the American zone of Germany, with a total enrollment of 2,572, according to a recent State Department report. Fourteen of these schools are Catholic, with an enrollment of 1,833. Four are Evangelical, with an enrollment of 562. The remaining three are Confessional, Lutheran and Methodist, with 40, 25 and 12 students enrolled respectively.

* * *

Scientists at the headquarters of the Federation of American Scientists looked upon August 6th, anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, as the "unhappy birthday" of the Atomic Age, says W. A. Higinbotham, chairman of the Federation, in a news release. The Federation and the National Committee on Atomic Information, a group composed of 70 major national organizations to work with the scientists for educational purposes, is attempting to bring to the public the facts and implications of atomic energy. "It is worthwhile, however," says Mr. Higinbotham, "to note that a year after the Hiroshima bombing the public still thinks of atomic energy primarily as a weapon. They do not realize that atomic medicine has already saved tens of thousands of lives, that in five years atomic power may be propelling ships, and that in perhaps two years atomic fuels will be producing electric power at Oak Ridge, Tennessee." William L. Laurence, atomic specialist for the *New York Times*, who witnessed the blast at Nagasaki and the two explosions at Bikini, wrote on August 3rd, "If there is anything, the world needs more than further Bikini tests, it is a reawakening of its consciousness

to the fact that the atomic bomb is not just another weapon against which our military minds will find a defense, but the greatest cataclysmic force ever released on earth."

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war-time powers, President Truman seized the coal mines and a number of other industrial plants. In the railroad strike he went before Congress to demand labor legislation so drastic that he ought for the rest of his life to be grateful that he didn't get it. When the government begins to draft workers to serve private employers human liberty goes out of the window.

The fact that many of these strikes were staged by large and well organized unions, some of which have long had a reputation for conservative leadership and sound judgment, was forgotten in the crisis. What lay back of these strikes?

In the first place, at the beginning of the war labor gave a "No Strike" pledge that was faithfully kept all during the conflict, despite widespread propaganda to the contrary. War Department officials have declared that only one-tenth of one percent of time was lost in the war industries because of labor disturbances. In other words, the pledge was kept ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent. This is a remarkable record in view of the fact that there was an immense expansion in even the older industries, that many war plants had to be built from the ground up, that millions of new and inexperienced workers were brought in from rural areas who had never had experience in trades unionism, that in many cases management and supervisory employees were themselves untrained and inexperienced.

The "No Strike" pledge had the effect of creating a huge backlog of irritations and grievances on the part of both management and labor that in the ordinary course of events would have been settled on the spot, but which perforce had to be reserved for future disposition. During the war management became fearful of the increased power of the unions. On its part, labor remembered management's campaign to break the unions at the close of World War I. With the National Association of Manufacturers' "American Plan" fresh in their minds, labor leaders determined that nothing of the sort should happen this time. Long hours of labor without adequate rest contributed to short tempers on both sides. It looked like a good time for a showdown.

Post-war wages was the match that set off the explosion. Cancellation of war contracts began after V-E Day and reached flood tide after V-J Day. Overtime and double time came to an end. Many workers were laid off. Many jobs were reclassified at a lower rate of pay. Unemployment went up sharply. Workers who had received the so-called "high wages" found their income cut in half or themselves out of a job, with no corresponding reduction in taxes or living costs. From those who continued to work income tax withholdings and payroll deductions for bond purchases and social security continued to take their toll from the pay envelope. In the background was the threat of further reductions in wages to 40c an hour level. In anticipation of a let-down at the end of the war, both the President and organized labor had besought Congress to raise the figure to 65c an hour, but Congress refused the necessary legislation.

Many union leaders are poor psychologists. Instead of interpreting their demands as an effort to prevent reduction of income of workers in a critical period, they allowed the press to play them up as demands for wage increases. As a matter of fact, the wages increases demanded were designed to cushion the workers against the loss of over-time and double-time earned during the war years, and thus help prevent an economic tailspin. The worker who had been earning \$75 to \$80 per week, in many cases, found his pay reduced to \$38 to \$40 per week. The answer, according to the unions, was to secure from employers a higher regular wage rate to compensate for these losses.

Congress contributed to the situation by inserting provisions in the excess profits tax law whereby industrial concerns able to show book losses in the years immediately following the war are

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allowed recapture from the government a sufficient amount from their excess profits taxes to give them a normal profit. For example, industries which expanded plant facilities in order to handle war contracts are permitted to amortize the cost of these plants against their war profits. If at the war's end such costs had not been completely amortized, the remainder could be charged against the profits for the quarter. If this process showed a loss the industry can recover from the government. Many industries were thus able to renovate their plants or build new plants and pay for them out of war earnings. And if such payments caused the industry to show a loss it could recover a part of its excess profits tax payments from the government. At the same time, Congress so thoroughly emasculated the so-called "Full Employment Bill," designed to protect the workers, that it gave them little protection.

SETTLEMENTS. The 18½c an hour increase on which most of the strikes were settled represents a compromise. In the case of the coal strike, labor won two important victories. After the government took over the mines a contract was signed with the United Mine Workers providing for adoption of federal safety standards. Federal regulations are generally more stringent than state and local safety codes, but are not mandatory. The miners also got their health and welfare fund, but not under exclusive union jurisdiction as demanded. In the strikes of General Motors, Ford, U.S. Steel, Westinghouse and General Electric, settlement was likewise on the basis of compromise, the 18½c hourly increase serving as the basis. The unions were generally able to retain their union shop and dues check-off arrangements.

RESULTS. What did the strikes accomplish? From the standpoint of financial gains it may be assumed that most of them resulted in failure for both labor and management. Millions of dollars of profits were lost to industry and labor's loss in wages will probably never be made up by the increases won. Unions treasuries were depleted and strike funds were exhausted. Reconversion was delayed for months and the public was deprived of badly needed consumer goods.

What gains then have been achieved?

First. Grievances have been aired and issues have been fought out. Both management and labor have had a chance to get smoldering resentments "off their chests." The atmosphere has been cleared by the simple expedient of "telling off" each other.

Second. Both management and labor have had a chance to test their organizations. Labor feared that management was preparing another "American Plan" drive to break up the unions. Industry looked with apprehension on the growing power of labor, with its 15 million dues-paying members protected by the Wagner Act and led by men determined to unionize the whole country, including the heretofore unorganized South. Each has found that it cannot break the other and perhaps a new respect has been born that will lead to better understanding and a sense of mutual-ity of interest.

Third. While labor did not win all it asked for in wages, union security, and better working conditions, it did win substantial gains. Labor's place in the post-war era is assured. And while wages have not remained at the war-time level, neither have they fallen to pre-war rates. The railroad strike focused public attention on the fact that these workers have not fared so well under the Adamson Law of 1916. Once the highest paid workers in the nation, railroad men now earn less than carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, plasterers, and many other trades. Despite the fact that the railroads of the country grew rich during the war, their workers have been inadequately rewarded for the intolerably long hours of labor, often without rest between runs, handling troop trains and war materials to embarkation points while at the same time attempting to provide service for the civilian population. Many people who denounced Mr. Whitney and Mr. Johnson for calling the strike forgot that across the table from them and equally responsible for the impasse was Mr. Pelley and the directors of the Association of American Railroad.

LEGISLATION. After refusing to grant the President authority to draft labor, Congress passed the Case Bill over the protest of labor. President Truman retrieved a part of his labor support by promptly vetoing it. Another law passed by Congress is designed to end the practice of compelling trucking concerns to employ a union driver to ride with the regular driver in order to enter strongly unionized cities. A law aimed at James Caesar Petrillo and the Musicians Union, forbids the practice of compelling radio stations to hire "stand by" musicians not needed by the studios. Congress also refused to pass the Fair Employment Practices Act, thus leaving Negroes and members of other minority groups without protection against discrimination in employment.

LABOR AND THE CHURCH. In view of the importance of this subject it is treated elsewhere in this issue.

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tunity to read only the *Chicago Tribune* or the *New York Daily News*, for example, often get only one side of the picture presented. And many another newspaper slants the news to suit the policy of the paper, especially where controversial political or labor issues are concerned. With less than a dozen large advertisers supplying 50 percent of all radio network income the listening public is compelled to put up with the sloppy, sexy, sentimentalism of the "soap operas" and the screaming violence and murder of nightly recurring "mystery" broadcasts. And we are told that with the coming of frequency modulation and television the situation is likely to grow worse.

The remedy lies, in great measure, with the readers, the listeners and the movie-goers. Protest bad news policies. Promoters of the Liquor Ad Crusade, P.O. Box 44, Rollo, Missouri, supply at small cost gummed stickers that can be attached to liquor ads in your newspaper and mailed to the publisher, saying, "I Didn't Like This Ad in My Paper!" For movie houses showing objectionable films and radio stations broadcasting unwholesome matter similar protests are available. Only when the people assert themselves will our First Freedom be really free.

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former professor in Oberlin Theological Seminary, is now public relations director for the Ohio CIO Council. The Rev. Nelson Cruikshank, a Methodist minister, is serving as research director for the American Federation of Labor. Likewise a number of other ministers and church workers have found their place in the ranks of organized labor.

One of the useful agencies in this connection is the National Religion and Labor Foundation, with headquarters at 106 Carmel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. On its board, under the honorary presidency of Bishop Francis J. McConnell, it lists such religious leaders as Dr. Jerome Davis, Dr. John Haynes Holmes, Dr. Liston Pope, Dr. Edwin McNeil Poteat, along with labor leaders like Van A. Bittner, James B. Carey, A. Phillip Randolph, and Walter P. Reuther. The Foundation has active chapters in these principal cities.

More important, however, is the fact that there is a growing recognition of the community of interest between the churches and the labor movement in support of the right to a job, the right to good wages, the highest wages that industry can afford, to protection against the hazards of employment, disease, disability, and old age, to the right of protection of women from certain types of labor and to the prohibition of child labor. The churches have generally gone on record in support of the right of collective bargaining, social security, and for full and complete medical and hospital care for all the people. Labor and the churches have at last recognized each other as allies in the struggle to bring the fruits of the good life to mankind. The churches will continue to exercise their function as institutions of religion and labor unions will continue to serve their function as agencies of the workers, but in so doing they will work shoulder to shoulder to give to mankind a more abundant life.